

Message Text

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44

ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 IO-14 OMB-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

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FM AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5424

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMCONSUL BELFAST

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PBOR, EI

SUBJ: GOI FORECAST FOR NI ELECTIONS -- BAD BUT NOT DISASTROUS

1. SEAN DONLON OF FONOFF GAVE US FOLLOWING GOI FORECAST OF FEBRUARY 28 ELECTIONS IN NI. ANTI-ASSEMBLY PARTIES WILL PROBABLY WIN NARROW MAJORITY OF TWELVE WESTMINSTER SEATS AT ISSUE. BEST GUESS IS ABOUT SEVEN ANTI-ASSEMBLY WINS, ALL TO EXTREME PROTESTANTS WITH POSSIBLE EXCEPTION OF ONE FOR BERNADETTE DEVLIN MCALISKEY. PRO-ASSEMBLY PARTIES SHOULD WIN FIVE, WITH FULKNER UNIONISTS GETTING FOUR OF THESE AND SDLP ONE. HOWEVER, DONLON BELIEVES THERE IS NO PLACE FOR EXACT PREDICTIONS IN SITUATION WHERE THERE ARE NO OPINION POLLS AND MANY THREE-OR FOUR-SIDED CONTESTS. HE EXPECTS TOTAL POPULAR VOTE TO BE DIVIDED ALMOST EVENLY BETWEEN ASSEMBLY AND ANTI-ASSEMBLY PARTIES, WITH PRO-ASSEMBLY GROUPS PERHAPS WINNING JUST OVER FIFTY PERCENT.

2. IMPACT OF THIS RESULT, GOI BELIEVES, WOULD BE BAD BUT NOT DISASTROUS. EXECUTIVE WILL CARRY ON REGARDLESS. EVERYONE KNOWS THAT ELECTION CAME AT VERY BAD TIME. IT WAS NOT REASONABLE TO EXPECT NEW EXECUTIVE TO CONTEST ELECTION BEFORE IT HAD WORKED TOGETHER FOR A FEW MONTHS AND ENTERED COUNCIL OF IRELAND. RIGHT NOW, PROSPECT OF COUNCIL FRIGHTENS UNIONISTS,

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BUT IT MAY BE MUCH LESS FRIGHTENING IN REAL LIFE.

3. NEVERTHELESS, ANTI-ASSEMBLY PARTIES WILL PORTRARY ELECTION AS A REFERENDUM ON SUNNINGDALE AGREEMENT, AND THEY WILL BE ABLE TO MAKE FAIRLY CREDIBLE ARGUMENT. THEY WILL CLAIM THAT NEW EXECUTIVE CLEARLY DOES NOT ENJOY WIDE POPULAR SUPPORT REQUIRED UNDER BRITISH CONSTITUTIONAL ACT. LONDON WILL REJECT THIS ARGUMENT BUT WILL BE EMBARRASSED BY IT. IT MAY BE NECES-SARY TO SCHEDULE FORMAL REFERENDUM NEXT AUTUMN, BUT THIS IS NOT DESIRABLE, AS NORTHERN IRELAND IS TIRED OF ELECTIONS (AFTER FORU IN ONE YEAR).

4. ON POSITIVE SIDE, NEW EXECUTIVE HAS HELD TOGETHER REASONABLY WELL UNDER STRAIN OF ELECTIONS, DESPITE SDLP DECISION TO CONTEST SOME SEATS WHERE IT WILL HURT OTHER EXECUTIVE PARTIES. DONLON BELIEVES EXECUTIVE WILL BE ABLE TO CONTINUE ITS WORK, ALTHOUGH UNDER MANY STRAINS. MOORE

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